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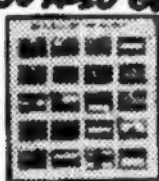
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FACSIMILES IN ORIGINAL COLOUR



FIRST OF THE LINE

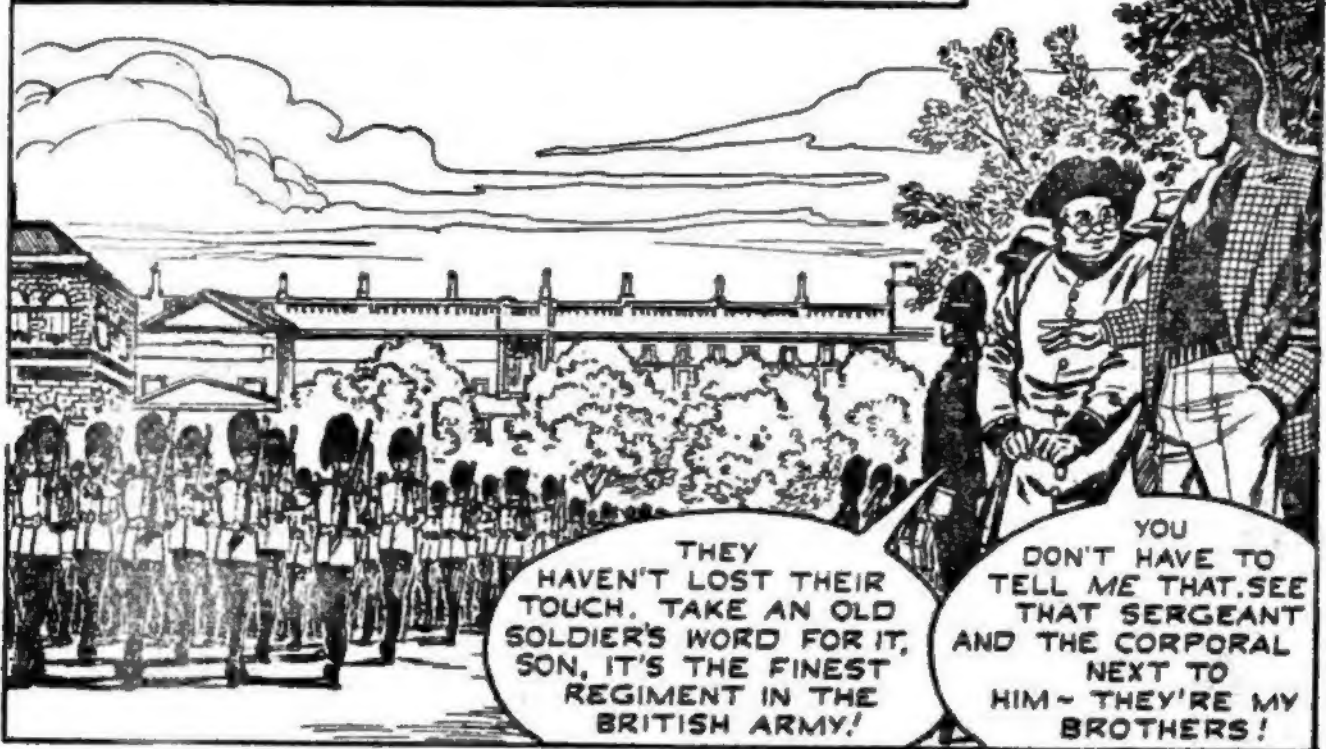
IN TIMES OF PEACE THE GUARDS DISPLAY A SPECTACLE OF PAGEANTRY UNEQUALLED IN MILITARY PRECISION. BUT ABOVE THOSE SCARLET-COATED FIGURES FLY THE COLOURS THAT BEAR LEGEND THAT THEY ARE NOT JUST CEREMONIAL TROOPS. . .



ALBUERA, INKERMANN, THE SOMME, YPRES. NAMES FROM THE PAST. BUT NAMES THAT PROVE THE GUARDS ARE AMONG THE FINEST FIGHTING INFANTRY IN THE WORLD.

Chapter 1. *Slope of Death*

AS THE BAND STRUCK UP THE REGIMENTAL MARCH, THE LONG LINE OF SCARLET-COATED FIGURES SWUNG OFF THE PARADE GROUND. FOR YOUNG 'LUCKY' JORDAN IT WAS A PROUD MOMENT, FOR IN THAT FORMATION MARCHED HIS TWO BROTHERS.



APRIL, 1943. THE TARMAc OF THE PARADE GROUND HAD GIVEN WAY TO THE VAST DUST BOWL OF THE WESTERN DESERT.

MESSAGE FROM BRIGADE, SIR. URGENT!



I DIDN'T THINK THEY WOULD LEAVE US IN PEACE FOR LONG.

UNTIL THE SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF THE DESPATCH RIDER, THE BATTALION HAD BEEN MOVING TO A FORWARD POSITION IN THE FRONT LINE. BUT NOW THOSE ORDERS WERE CHANGED . . .

THIS IS IT, TONY. OUR FIRST CRACK AT JERRY!



First Of The Line

A QUIET SMILE FLICKERED ACROSS COLONEL WHINCANDY'S FACE AS HE TURNED TO MAJOR ELCOMBE, HIS ADJUTANT.

THERE'S A COMPANY OF JERRY GRENADIERS WE'VE GOT TO TACKLE, TONY. CALL AN ORDER GROUP FOR ALL OFFICERS, TONIGHT.

VERY GOOD, SIR!

THAT SAME EVENING, THE COMMANDING OFFICER HELD HIS FIRST ORDER GROUP. THE AIR WAS ELECTRIC WITH EXPECTANCY AS HIS OFFICERS LISTENED CAREFULLY TO HIS EVERY WORD.

WADI EL KERIM

A COMPANY OF GOERING'S GRENADIERS HAVE BEEN REPORTED HERE, AT WADI EL KERIM. OUR JOB IS TO DESTROY THEM!

AT 0-FIVE-THIRTY HOURS TOMORROW, THE BATTALION WILL ATTACK THEIR WEST FLANK, HERE ALONG THIS RIDGE. MY LATEST INFORMATION IS THAT THE ENEMY HAS ONLY LIGHT MACHINE-GUNS IN SUPPORT. . .



SOON THE GUARDS WERE PREPARING FOR THE ATTACK THAT WAS TO TAKE PLACE THE FOLLOWING MORNING. SERGEANT MIKE JORDAN MISSED NOTHING AS HE MOVED AMONG HIS PLATOON. . .

COME ON, SOMMERS. I WANT TO SEE THAT GEAR A LOT BETTER THAN THAT. IF I DON'T, YOU'LL BE ON A FIZZER. WE'RE GOING TO SHOW THOSE JERRIES HOW GOOD THE GUARDS ARE.



OH, GO TAKE A RUNNING JUMP! WOODEN-HEADED N.C.O.'s! SPIT AND POLISH IS ALL THEY THINK OF!

THE BATTALION WAS ON THE MOVE LONG BEFORE FIRST LIGHT. COLONEL WHINCANDY HALTED THEM ON SIGHTING THEIR OBJECTIVE AND STUDIED THE GROUND AHEAD. RAPIDLY, HE ISSUED HIS FINAL ORDERS. . .



MAJOR ELCOMBE WILL MOVE 'D' COMPANY TO THE LEFT FLANK. WHEN WE CROSS THE START LINE THEY WILL GIVE US COVERING FIRE. 'A', 'B' AND 'C' COMPANIES, EXTENDED ORDER BEHIND US.

First Of The Line

WITH PARADE GROUND PRECISION,
THE BATTALION DEPLOYED FOR
THE ASSAULT. . .



AS THE GUNS OF THEIR SUPPORTING COMPANY SHATTERED THE STILL
MORNING AIR, THE REST OF THE BATTALION SWEEPED FORWARD
TOWARDS THE SILENT RIDGE.



ABOVE THEM, THE RIDGE CAME ALIVE WITH DARK UNIFORMED FIGURES. A MURDEROUS HAIL OF FIRE SWEEPED DOWN THE SLOPE, SCYTHING GREAT GAPS IN THE ADVANCE.



IN THE MIDDLE OF THE INFERNO OF BURSTING GRENADES AND WHINING BULLETS, MIKE JORDAN SAW HIS BROTHER FALL. FOR ONE MOMENT HE PAUSED. BUT THE GUARDS' IRON DISCIPLINE OVERCAME HIS NATURAL INSTINCT TO HELP HIS STRICKEN BROTHER . . .

TED!
THEY'VE GOT YOU,
BOY!

KEEP
GOING,
MEN!



First Of The Line

NOTHING COULD STAND AGAINST THE DEVASTATING FIRE FROM THE GERMAN GUNS. INCH BY INCH, THE GUARDS WERE FORCED TO GIVE GROUND.

'A' AND 'B' COMPANIES, REFORM! 'C' COMPANY, CLOSE UP AT THE REAR! WE'VE BEEN ORDERED TO TAKE THAT RIDGE, AND WE'RE GOING TO!



AGAIN, THE GUARDS SWARMED UP THE HILL, BUT AGAIN THEY WERE FORCED TO GO TO GROUND. IN A SHALLOW DEPRESSION, THE GALLANT COLONEL GAVE HIS LAST ORDERS. . .

I'M DONE FOR, PETER. GET A RUNNER BACK TO 'D' COMPANY. TELL THEM TO BLAST THIS RIDGE WITH ALL THEY'VE GOT. WHISTLE UP BRIGADE, SAY WE DID OUR BEST, BUT THERE WERE TOO... MANY...



I'LL GET THEM OUT, SIR.

FOR A LONG MOMENT, MAJOR PETER WILCOX REMAINED IN MUTE GRIEF BESIDE HIS DEAD COMMANDER. THEN THE INCESSANT RATTLE OF THE MACHINE-GUNS BROUGHT HIM BACK TO REALITY. . .

SOMMERS! GET BACK TO DON COMPANY, FAST AS YOU CAN. TELL MAJOR ELCOMBE TO PUT DOWN ALL HE'S GOT ONTO THE RIDGE. AS SOON AS THE BARRAGE STARTS, WE'LL PULL BACK AND JOIN HIM. GET GOING, MAN!



YES, SIR.

SOMMERS NEEDED NO SECOND BIDDING. LURCHING TO HIS FEET, HE SPED BACK DOWN THE SLOPE. HEAVY SLUGS FROM THE SPANDAUS BUZZED AROUND HIM LIKE ANGRY BEES.



WHAT A STROKE OF LUCK! IF I CAN MAKE COVER, OLD WILCOX CAN RUN HIS OWN MESSAGES. THEY CAN KEEP THEIR DEATH AND GLORY STUFF... I'M GOING TO KEEP MY SKIN IN ONE PIECE.

First Of The Line

ACROSS THE DESERT, THE CLAMOUR OF BATTLE DRIFTED TO THE WAITING 'D' COMPANY. ANXIOUSLY, MAJOR TONY ELCOMBE TRAINED HIS FIELD-GLASSES ON THE RIDGE.

THE FIRING SOUNDS PRETTY HEAVY, SIR. COULD WE GIVE THEM A BIT OF SUPPORT, BY AN INDIRECT SHOOT?

WE DAREN'T OPEN UP, FOR ALL WE KNOW THEY'VE GOT TO THE TOP BY NOW. WHY THE DICKENS DON'T THEY SEND BACK A RUNNER?



BUT 'D' COMPANY WAITED FOR A MESSAGE THAT WOULD NEVER COME. BY A STROKE OF ILL FATE, MAJOR WILCOX HAD CHOSEN THE ONE MAN IN THE BATTALION HE SHOULD NOT HAVE TRUSTED . . .

I'VE MADE IT!
I'D BE CUT DOWN IF
I TRIED TO GET TO
'D' COMPANY. THAT SLOPE
IS RIDDLED WITH FIRE.
I'LL LIE UP HERE TILL
THE SHOOTING DIES
DOWN.



First Of The Line

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SLOWLY, THE FIRING DIED OUT ON THE HILL. EVEN THE NAZI OBERST FELT SOMETHING LIKE ADMIRATION FOR THE MEN WHO WERE DYING SO GALLANTLY ON THAT SUICIDE SLOPE.

ONE MORE RUSH AND THEY'D HAVE BEEN ON US. BUT NOW WE HAVE THEM PINNED DOWN.

JA! THE ENGLANDERS FIGHT WELL. THEIR GUARDS DO NOT KNOW WHEN THEY ARE BEATEN.

BITTERLY, MAJOR WILCOX REALISED THAT HELP WAS NOT COMING. THE ORDER TO RETREAT DIED ON HIS LIPS AS A SPLINTER FROM A BURSTING GRENADE FOUND ITS MARK.



First Of The Line

ONE BY ONE, THE BRAVE SURVIVORS OF THAT FRANTIC CHARGE DIED. AT LONG LAST THE GUNS WERE SILENT FOR NOT A MOVEMENT OF LIFE COULD BE SEEN. AMONG THOSE STILL FORMS LAY TWO BROTHERS . . .



AN HOUR LATER, A REGIMENT OF MATILDA TANKS RUMBLED INTO THE ATTACK. THE GERMANS, STILL STUNNED BY THE FEROCITY OF THE GUARDS' ONSLAUGHT, FELL AN EASY PREY. . .



HULLO,
COMO ONE... ALL
RESISTANCE FINISHED.
REGRET COLONEL WHINCANDY
KILLED IN ACTION. BELIEVE
ONLY ONE SURVIVOR FROM
THREE COMPANIES. THEY
OPENED THE WAY FOR US, WE
WALKED STRAIGHT IN.

BUT AT 'D' COMPANY, THE ONE SURVIVOR WAS NOT GIVEN A HERO'S WELCOME. SERGEANT GRANT FACED THE SURLY FIGURE OF SOMMERS WITH A HOSTILE STARE.

FUNNY THING, SOMMERS - YOU WERE KNOCKED OUT COLD ALL THROUGH THE SCRAP BUT I CAN'T SEE ANY WOUND ON YOUR HEAD!

LIKE I TOLD YOU, SARGE. A CHUNK OF SHRAPNEL MUST HAVE HIT ME. MY TIN LID SAVED ME. ANYWAY, I WAS OUT CLEAN AS A WHISTLE. WHEN I CAME ROUND, IT WAS ALL OVER...



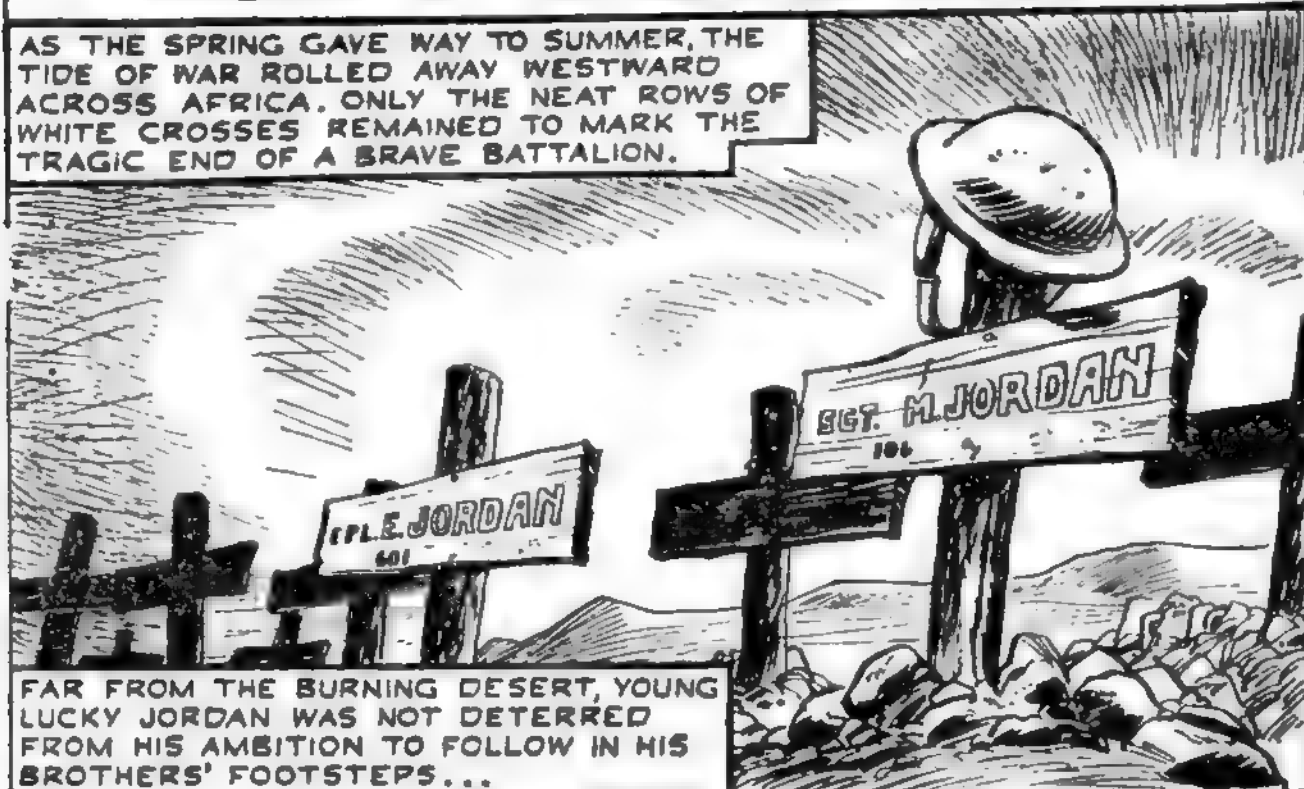
A HARD COLD GLINT CAME INTO THE SERGEANT'S EYES. HE HAD LOST MANY GOOD FRIENDS IN THE FIGHT AND HE TOOK NO PAINS TO CONCEAL HIS SUSPICION. . .

AND I SAY YOU DUCKED OUT OF IT, SOMMERS! BUT THE WAR'S NOT OVER YET AND I'LL BE AROUND, SO WATCH IT, SOLDIER!



Chapter 2. Seeds of Hate

AS THE SPRING GAVE WAY TO SUMMER, THE TIDE OF WAR ROLLED AWAY WESTWARD ACROSS AFRICA. ONLY THE NEAT ROWS OF WHITE CROSSES REMAINED TO MARK THE TRAGIC END OF A BRAVE BATTALION.



FAR FROM THE BURNING DESERT, YOUNG LUCKY JORDAN WAS NOT DETERRED FROM HIS AMBITION TO FOLLOW IN HIS BROTHERS' FOOTSTEPS...

FOR LUCKY, THE LONG-AWAITED DAY ARRIVED AT LAST—THE DAY HE ENTERED THE FORBIDDING GATES OF THE GUARDS DEPOT.



SO YOU'RE YOUNG JORDAN! I KNEW YOUR BROTHERS WELL. THEY DON'T COME ANY BETTER THAN THEY WERE.

DID YOU, SIR? WE WERE PRETTY CUT UP AT THE TIME. BUT THEY DIED WITH THE REGIMENT. IT WAS THEIR DUTY AND THEY DID IT. THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERS ISN'T IT, SIR?

FOR A MOMENT, THE SERGEANT'S GRIZZLED FACE RELAXED INTO A WARM SMILE. THEN THE NORMAL STERN EXPRESSION OF A GUARDS N.C.O. CAME BACK TO HIS FACE.

YES, JORDAN, IT IS! BUT DON'T CALL ME SIR, I'M A SERGEANT...AND STAND TO ATTENTION WHEN YOU SPEAK TO AN N.C.O. YOU'RE IN THE GUARDS NOW!



SOON LUCKY WAS EXCHANGING HIS CIVVIES FOR A SUIT OF KHAKI BATTLE- DRESS. AS THE CROWD OF RECRUITS FILED THROUGH THE QUARTERMASTER'S STORE, THEY COLLECTED AN EVER-GROWING PILE OF CLOTHING AND EQUIPMENT.

COME ON! DON'T TAKE ALL DAY. YOU'RE ALL GOING FOR A NICE HAIRCUT AFTER THIS. MOST OF YOU NEED IT!



First Of The Line

BY THE EVENING, THE NEW RECRUITS FELT THAT CIVVY STREET WAS FAR BEHIND THEM. UNDER THE EXPERT GUIDANCE OF A TRAINED SOLDIER, THEY WERE INITIATED INTO THE MYSTERIES OF THE GLEAMING BOOTS, BLANCOED WEBBING AND BURNISHED BRASSES THAT ARE THE HALL-MARKS OF THE GUARDS.



IN THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, LUCKY FOUND THAT TRAINING WAS TOUGH AND RIGOROUS. FROM THE FIRST NOTE OF REVEILLE TO THE END OF THE DAY WHEN THEY SANK WEARILY ON THEIR BEDS, THERE WAS NO LET UP. . .

LET'S HAVE YOU, THEN! FALL IN, IN THREE RANKS. MOVE YOURSELVES!



STEP BY STEP THEY LEARNED THE ART OF MODERN WARFARE. ON THE RANGE FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THEIR LIVES, THEY FELT THE VIBRANT KICK OF THE LIGHT MACHINE-GUNS . . .



PAINFULLY AT FIRST, THE TOUGHENING-UP PROCESS BEGAN. . .



First Of The Line

IN THE QUIET ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE THEY WERE TAUGHT THE ART OF CAMOUFLAGE AND FIELD-CRAFT. WITH SCATHING COMMENTS, THE INSTRUCTORS RAMMED HOME THE LESSONS THAT HAD TO BE LEARNED.

IF OLD 'ITLER COULD SEE YOU LOT NOW...HE'D DIE LAUGHIN'. STOP BOBBING AND WEAVING ABOUT LIKE A LOT OF OLD HENS!



BUT ABOVE ALL ELSE 'SQUARE-BASHING' TOOK PRIORITY. TO THE STAMP OF FEET AND THE SLAP OF RIFLE BUTTS, THEY LEARNED THE INSTANT OBEDIENCE TO ORDERS THAT HAVE CARRIED THE GUARDS THROUGH SO MANY DESPERATE BATTLES.

MY DEAR OLD GRANNIE CAN MARCH BETTER THAN THIS, AND SHE'S EIGHTY-FIVE. GET A GRIP OF YOUR RIFLE, THAT MAN IN THE REAR RANK!

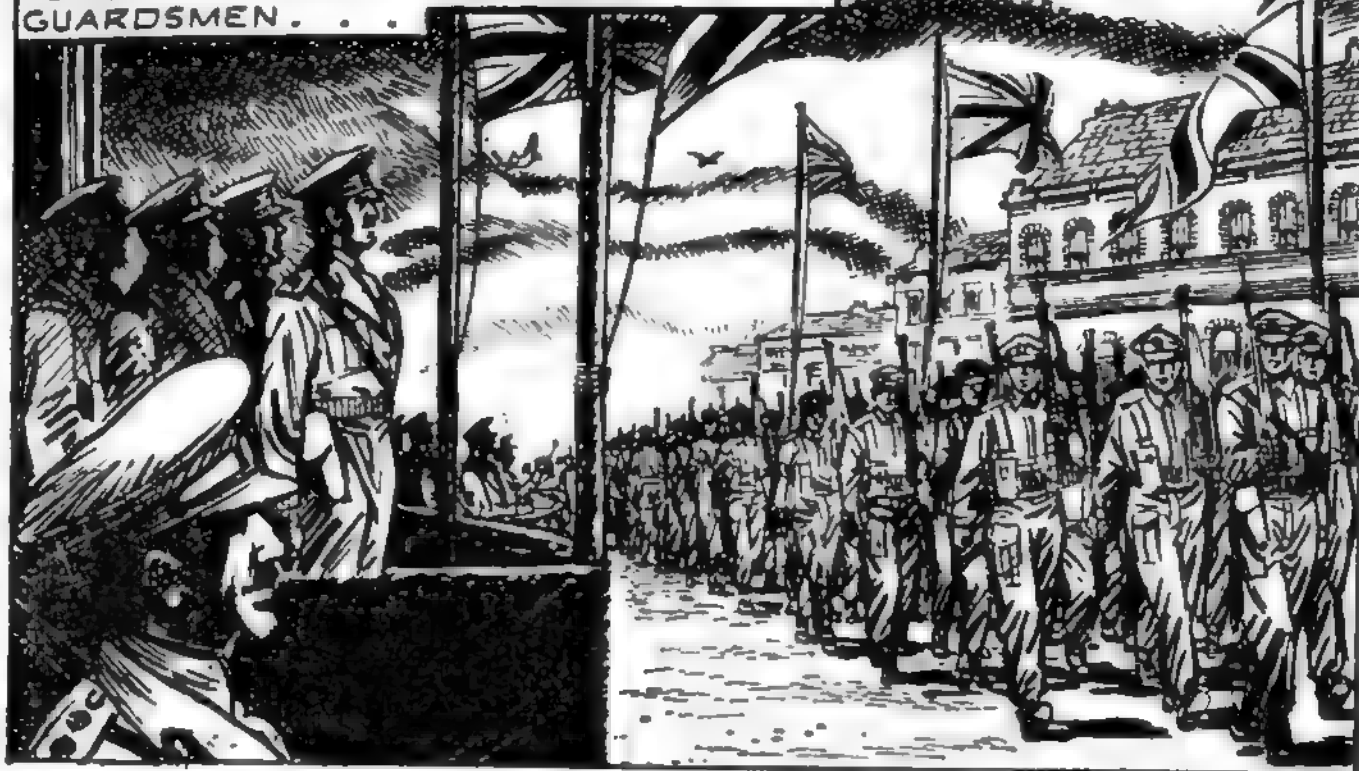


LUCKY FOUND HIMSELF FEELING AT HOME IN THE GUARDS. HE WAS A NATURAL SOLDIER. EVEN THE IMPLACABLE REGIMENTAL SERGEANT-MAJOR HAD A WORD OF PRAISE FOR HIM. . .

GOOD TURN-OUT, SOLDIER. KEEP IT UP!



THE WEEKS SPED BY. AT THE END OF THE COURSE, A PASSING-OUT PARADE WAS HELD. THE RECRUITS WHEELED ACROSS THE PARADE GROUND IN IMMACULATE FORMATION. THEY HAD BECOME GUARDSMEN. . .



TWO DAYS LATER THEY WERE POSTED TO THEIR UNITS. TO LUCKY'S DELIGHT, HE FOUND HE WAS ON DRAFT FOR THE REFORMED FOURTH BATTALION.



IT'S A REAL BREAK FOR ME-THAT'S THE BATTALION MY BROTHERS SERVED IN.

YOU'LL NEED YOUR LUCK. THEY'LL BE SENDING US TO EUROPE ANY DAY NOW.

First Of The Line

ON ARRIVAL AT THE BATTALION, THE NEW INTAKE WAS SPLIT UP AMONG THE COMPANIES. LUCKY FOUND HIMSELF IN A BARRACK-ROOM OF SEASONED TROOPS.



SOMMERS WAS A TROUBLEMAKER, A MAN WITH A GRUDGE. LUCKY HAD NOT MET ANYONE LIKE HIM IN THE GUARDS AND HE FELT HIMSELF BECOMING MORE AND MORE ANGRY AS SOMMERS WENT ON . . .



LUCKY DID NOT SEE THE SCOWL THAT DARKENED THE FACE OF MILES SOMMERS - HE HAD MADE A BAD ENEMY.



COCKY
YOUNG BLIGHTER.
JUST LIKE HIS
BROTHERS! I'LL
FIX YOU, MISTER
PERISHIN' JORDAN!

THREE DAYS LATER, LUCKY COMPLETED THE METICULOUS PREPARATION NEEDED FOR HIS FIRST GUARD DUTY AT HIS NEW CAMP. HE DID NOT NOTICE FURTIVE MOVEMENTS AT THE RIFLE RACK.

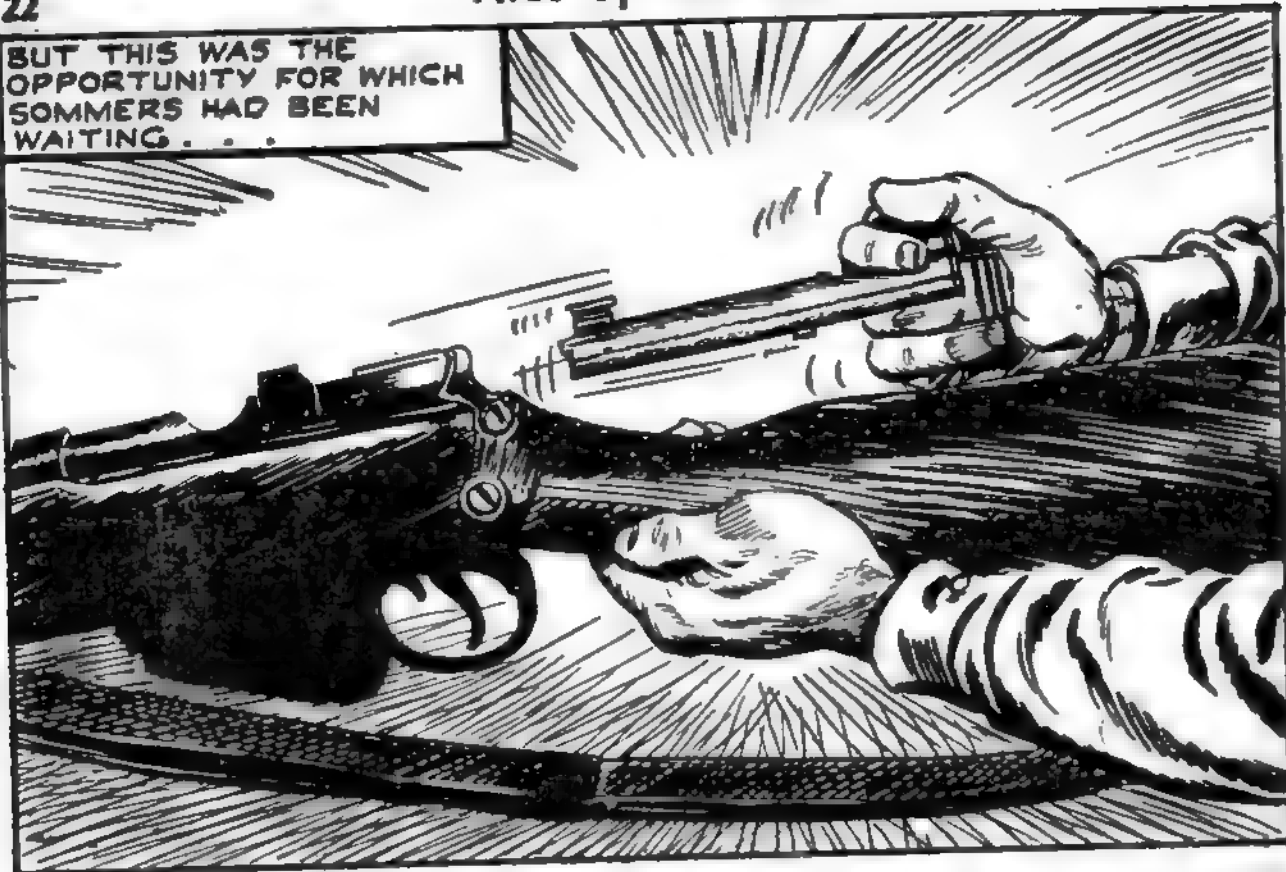


HOW DO
I LOOK? IT'S MY
FIRST GUARD DUTY
HERE! I DON'T WANT
TO SLIP
UP!

DON'T
FLAP, LAD.
YOU'LL BE
OKAY!

First Of The Line

BUT THIS WAS THE OPPORTUNITY FOR WHICH SOMMERS HAD BEEN WAITING . . .



LUCKY HURRIED FROM THE BARRACK-ROOM, SNATCHING HIS RIFLE FROM THE RACK AS HE WENT. IT WAS NOT UNTIL THE OFFICER OF THE DAY WAS INSPECTING THE GUARD THAT HE REALISED THE CALAMITY THAT HAD BEFALLEN HIM. . .

THE BOLT IS MISSING FROM THIS MAN'S RIFLE, SERGEANT-MAJOR. PUT HIM ON A CHARGE!

YES, SIR!



THE FOLLOWING DAY, LUCKY WAS CHARGED AND WAS MARCHED BEFORE HIS COMMANDING OFFICER.



First Of The Line

JORDAN RETURNED DEJECTEDLY TO HIS BARRACK ROOM, BUT HIS PLATOON SERGEANT STILL HAD A FEW WORDS TO SAY.

YOU'VE SLOTTED YOUR COPY BOOK STRAIGHT AWAY, MY LAD. JUST YOU WATCH IT!



FOR THE NEXT SEVEN DAYS, LUCKY ENDURED THE ENDLESS PUNISHMENT DRILLS AND FATIGUES OF HIS SEVEN DAYS SENTENCE...

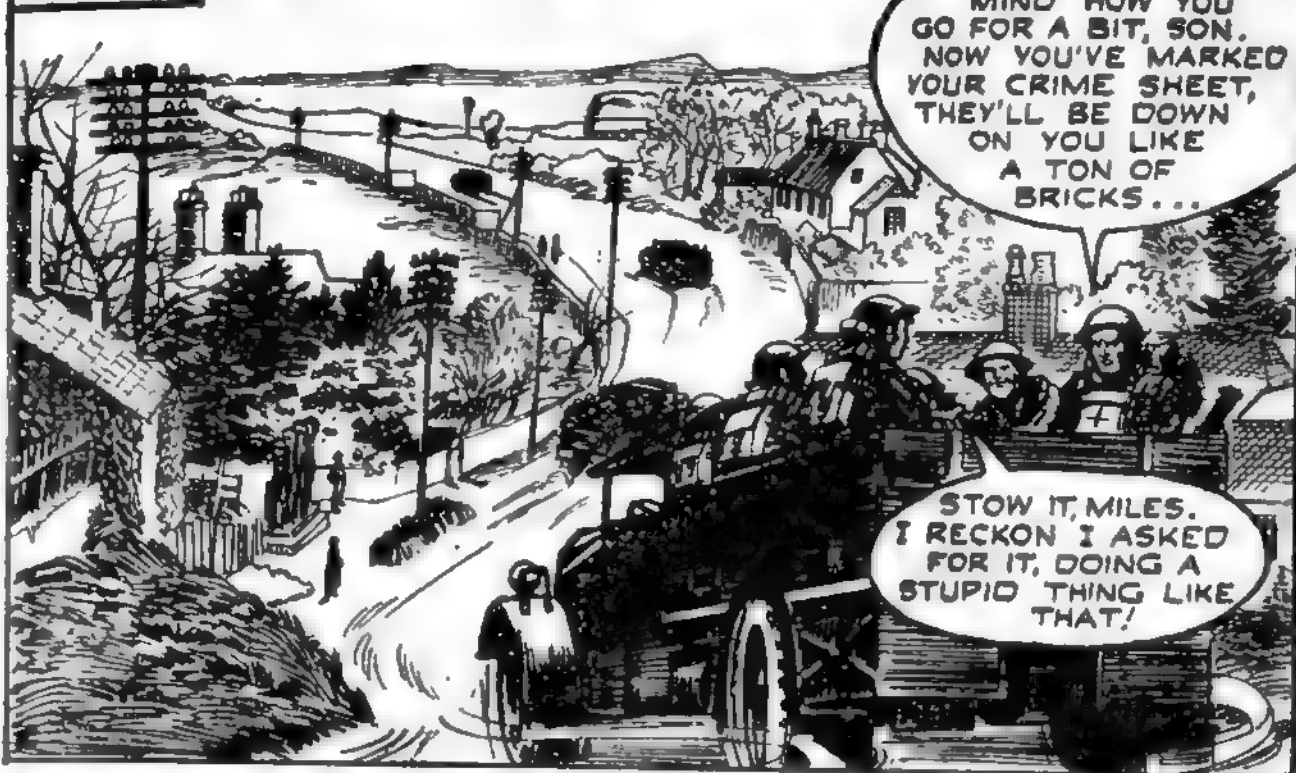
I DON'T WANT ANOTHER SPELL OF JANKERS IN A HURRY. THEY'VE CERTAINLY PUSHED US AROUND THESE LAST FEW DAYS.

CUT OUT THE JAWING AND GET ON WITH IT!

MAYBE YOU WON'T BE SO KEEN ON THE PERISHIN' GUARDS IN FUTURE, LUCKY JORDAN.



AT LAST, THE WEEK OF PUNISHMENT CAME TO AN END. THE BATTALION PREPARED TO MOVE INTO THE FIELD ON A LARGE TRAINING SCHEME.



LATER THAT DAY, THE BATTALION DUG IN ALONG THE CREST OF A HILL. SOURLY, MILES SOMMERS SURVEYED THE BARREN SLOPES AROUND THEM.



First Of The Line

A BITTER SMILE SPREAD ACROSS SOMMERS' FACE AS HE TURNED TO HIS YOUNG COMRADE...

DON'T LET 'EM FOOL YOU, KID. IT WAS JUST PLAIN MURDER. WE GOT CUT TO PIECES. WE GOT ANOTHER BATTLE HONOUR, BUT THAT DON'T HELP YOUR BROTHERS!

YOU MEAN THEY WERE KILLED FOR NO PURPOSE?

BLIND FURY OVERWHELMED JORDAN AS HE LISTENED TO THE WORDS OF HIS COMPANION.

THAT'S RIGHT, CHUM - NONE OF THE LADS NEED HAVE BEEN KILLED. THE TANKS CAME IN AFTER US AND MOPPED UP ALL THE JERRIES.

THE
GAVE
TALE

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First Of The Line

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THE LONG, COLD HOURS OF THE NIGHT THAT FOLLOWED GAVE LUCKY AMPLE TIME TO BROOD OVER THE GRIM TALE HE HAD HEARD.

MILES WAS THERE. HE SHOULD KNOW. MAYBE WE ARE JUST CANNON FODDER, LIKE HE SAYS?



IN THE GREY OF THE DAWN, THE MEN CLIMBED STIFFLY FROM THEIR POSITIONS. THANKFUL THAT THE COLD NIGHT VIGIL WAS OVER, THEY MOVED FORWARD TO THE MOCK ATTACK THAT WAS THE CULMINATION OF THE EXERCISE.

MOVE OUT INTO EXTENDED ORDER. WHEN WE CROSS THE START LINE WE'LL HAVE SUPPORT FROM THE GUNS. THEY'LL LAY A CREEPING BARRAGE IN FRONT OF US.



First Of The Line.

AS THE LINES OF INFANTRY ADVANCED, THEY COULD HEAR THE DEEP EXPLOSIONS OF THE TWENTY-FIVE POUNDER BATTERIES AS THEY OPENED UP. SUDDENLY ONE SHELL LANDED MERE YARDS FROM THE LINE OF KHAKI-CLAD FIGURES.

SIGNAL
HEADQUARTERS
ONE GUN FIRING
SHORT. CEASE
FIRE!



HULLO, FOX...
URGENT... CEASE FIRE,
ONE GUN FIRING SHORT...
REPEAT CEASE
FIRE...

WHO THE HECK
TOLD YOU LOT TO
STOP? WE'VE BEEN
ORDERED TO ADVANCE.
KEEP YOUR HEADS DOWN
AND KEEP GOING...
FORWARD!



SECO
COM
CEAS
AND
FROM

WITH
A H

SECONDS LATER, THE BATTERY COMMANDER ROARED THE ORDER TO CEASE FIRE... BUT ALREADY ANOTHER SALVO HAD CRASHED OUT FROM THE GUNS.

CEASE FIRE! CLEAR GUNS!



STRETCHER PARTY! AT THE DOUBLE!



WITH A BLINDING FLASH, THE LAST SHELL FELL AMONG A HANDFUL OF MEN IN THE ADVANCING LINE.

First Of The Line

TRIUMPHANTLY, SOMMERS TURNED TO THE SHAKEN YOUNGSTER BESIDE HIM.

MAYBE NOW YOU'LL BELIEVE WHAT A COCKEYED OUTFIT THIS IS! WE'VE JUST LOST A COUPLE OF MEN... AND THAT'S IN A PRACTICE ATTACK!



THAT NIGHT, LUCKY SAT DEEP IN THOUGHT IN THE CANTEEN. VAGUELY, HE BECAME AWARE OF THE HARSH VOICE THAT BARKED AT HIM.

YOU GONE DEAF, SOLDIER? I SAID IT'S TIME TO CLEAR THE CANTEEN. WHEN YOU'RE GIVEN AN ORDER, YOU OBEY IT... NOW, MOVE!



First Of The Line

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THE POISON THAT SOMMERS HAD INSTILLED IN THE YOUNG SOLDIER'S MIND, HAD DONE ITS WORK. IN A FLASH OF TEMPER, JORDAN LASHED OUT AT THE CORPORAL.

I'M SICK
OF YOUR DARNED
STUPID ORDERS!



TOO DAZED TO REALISE WHAT HE HAD DONE, LUCKY DID NOT FEEL THE STRONG HANDS THAT MARCHED HIM TO THE GUARD-ROOM.

YOU'VE DONE
IT NOW, GUARDSMAN.
YOU'LL GET THE
GLASS-HOUSE FOR
THIS!



First Of The Line

IN DUE COURSE LUCKY WAS BROUGHT BEFORE A DISTRICT COURT-MARTIAL. WOODENLY, HE STOOD TO ATTENTION AS HE HEARD THE FINDINGS OF THE COURT.



DURING THE DAYS THAT FOLLOWED, JORDAN DEVELOPED A COLD HATRED FOR THE REGIMENT THAT HE HAD ONCE WORSHIPPED. . .



Ch

AT THE
JORDAN
HIS TWO
SENTE
OFFICE
ALLIED
GATHER
AT WHI
VITAL C

METHO
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Chapter 3. Death of a Coward

AT THE TIME LUCKY JORDAN WAS SERVING HIS TWENTY-EIGHT DAY SENTENCE, SENIOR OFFICERS OF THE ALLIED FORCES GATHERED TOGETHER AT WHITEHALL FOR A VITAL CONFERENCE.

THE GERMANS ARE RETREATING IN THE NORTHERN SECTOR, GENTLEMEN. ONLY THE BLACK MOUNTAINS NOW BAR OUR WAY TO GERMAN SOIL. THEY MUST BE BREACHED...



METHODICALLY, GENERAL NORTHFIELD OUTLINED THE PLAN FOR THE THRUST THAT MIGHT PROVE A MORTAL BLOW TO THE GERMAN WAR MACHINE.

A TASK FORCE OF A DIVISION TOGETHER WITH TWO ARMoured BRIGADES WILL MOVE TO FRANCE. THEY WILL ATTACK ONE SECTOR OF THE BLACK MOUNTAINS, ALLOWING THE THIRD ARMY CORPS TO ADVANCE THROUGH AND FORM THE SPEARHEAD THRUST INTO GERMANY.



First Of The Line

AS THE GENERAL ISSUED HIS INSTRUCTIONS, AMERICAN MARINES OF THE THIRD ARMY CORPS ACROSS THE CHANNEL MOPPED UP THE FAST-DWINDING GERMAN RESISTANCE IN THE TOWN OF NANCY.



EACH MAN KNEW AS THEY MOVED FORWARD, THAT SOMEWHERE AHEAD LAY THE LAST DESPERATE STRUGGLE FOR THE BREAK-THROUGH INTO GERMANY. THE ADVANCE WAS MEETING MORE SAVAGE RESISTANCE WITH EVERY MILE.



THREE DAYS LATER, THE FOURTH BATTALION OF THE GUARDS, WITH THE REST OF THE BRITISH DIVISION, EMBARKED FOR EUROPE. IN THE LINE OF MEN THAT STOOD ON THE QUAYSIDE WAS LUCKY JORDAN...

KEEP AN EYE ON THAT YOUNGSTER, SERGEANT. HE'S GETTING SOME BAD HABITS!



YES, SIR! JORDAN IS BECOMING A REGULAR BARRACK ROOM LAWYER...

LUCKY STARED OUT ACROSS THE SEA. HE HAD LOST INTEREST. NOW HE FELT NOTHING BUT BITTERNESS FOR THE SYSTEM THAT HAD DESTROYED HIS BROTHERS AND SOUGHT TO CRUSH HIM IN ITS IRON GRIP.

WHAT'S BITING YOU, SON? SINCE YOU'VE BEEN WITH THIS UNIT, YOU'VE GONE HAYWIRE. WHAT'S THE TROUBLE?



LEAVE ME ALONE, SERGEANT, WILL YOU? I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF!

First Of The Line

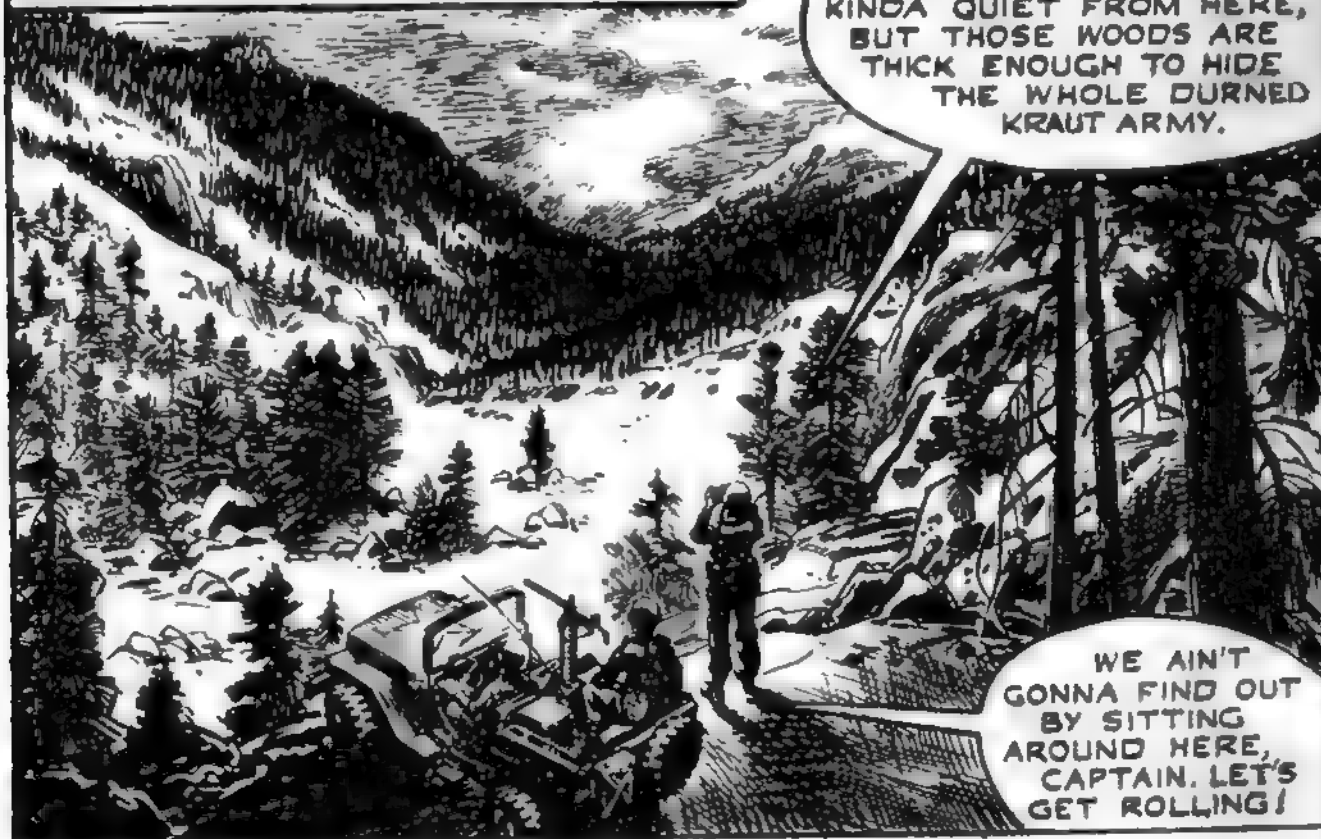
THOUGHTFULLY, SERGEANT GRANT WATCHED LUCKY SLOUCH AWAY ALONG THE DECK.

I'D LIKE TO KNOW WHAT'S EATING THAT KID! I OWE IT TO HIS BROTHERS TO HELP HIM IF I CAN!



MEANWHILE, THE ADVANCED UNITS OF THE AMERICAN THIRD ARMY CORPS SIGHTED THE BLACK MOUNTAINS. THOUGHTFULLY THE COMBAT COMMANDER STUDIED THE OMINOUSLY SILENT, FIR-COVERED SLOPES.

THERE'RE THE MOUNTAINS, SERGEANT. LOOK KINDA QUIET FROM HERE, BUT THOSE WOODS ARE THICK ENOUGH TO HIDE THE WHOLE DURNED KRAUT ARMY.



WE AIN'T GONNA FIND OUT BY SITTING AROUND HERE, CAPTAIN. LET'S GET ROLLING!

THE AMERICAN OFFICER'S FEARS HAD NOT BEEN MISPLACED. UNSEEN FROM THE AIR, FIELD-GRAY UNIFORMED FIGURES MOVED CAUTIOUSLY AMONG THE TREES.

GOOD! THESE AMERICAN DOGS WILL SEE HOW WE DEFEND OUR BELOVED FATHERLAND. NO MAN IS TO FIRE UNTIL I GIVE THE ORDER.

ALL UNITS ARE IN POSITION, HERR HAUPTMANN.



IN THE GATHERING TWILIGHT, THE LONG LINE OF INFANTRY MOVED STEADILY INTO THE FOREST. NO SOUND BROKE THE SILENCE, SAVE THE RUSTLE OF THE DRY UNDERGROWTH.

IF THERE ARE ANY JERRIES UP THERE, THEY'RE KEEPING PRETTY QUIET!

STOP SHOOTING YOUR MOUTH OFF! THE NOISE YOU'RE MAKING, THEY'LL HEAR YOU IN BERLIN!



First Of The Line

SUDDENLY THE MOUNTAINSIDE ERUPTED INTO A BLAZE OF GUNFIRE. THE FIRST DEADLY ROUND OF THE BATTLE OF THE BLACK MOUNTAINS HAD BEGUN. IN CHAOTIC UPROAR, THE AMERICANS STORMED FORWARD . . .

KEEP GOING, MEN? WE'VE GOT TO STOP THOSE MORTARS!



SOON, AMERICANS AND GERMANS WERE LOCKED IN CLOSE-QUARTER BATTLE. BOTH SIDES STRUGGLED DESPERATELY FOR SURVIVAL IN A NIGHTMARE OF FALLING TREES AND THUNDERING GUNS.



JUST
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SAYS
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BY

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AS
COL

First Of The Line

JUST BEFORE MIDNIGHT, AN EXHAUSTED MAJOR REPORTED TO THIRD ARMY ADVANCED HEADQUARTERS.

IT'S PRETTY RUGGED UP THERE, SIR. THE COLONEL SAYS WE'LL NEED REINFORCEMENTS BY DAWN.

YOU'LL GET REINFORCEMENTS. A BRITISH DIVISION IS BEING RUSHED HERE.



THROUGH THE NIGHT, THE BRITISH DIVISION, LED BY THE FOURTH GUARDS BATTALION, WAS HEADING TO THE FRONT...

SACRE BLEU! THEY ARE IN A HURRY!



BE GLAD IT IS THE BRITISH DOWN THERE AND NOT THE ACCURSED BOCHE!

TWO HOURS LATER, THE GUARDS HAD REACHED THE FRONT. AS THE MEN LEFT THEIR TRANSPORT AND FORMED UP, COLONEL KIDSTONE CALLED HIS OFFICERS TOGETHER.

WE'RE MOVING STRAIGHT INTO POSITION. OUR JOB IS TO HOLD THE END OF THE VALLEY. WE CAN EXPECT ARMoured ASSISTANCE LATER IN THE DAY, BUT UNTIL THEN WE MUST HOLD THAT PASS!



First Of The Line

THE HAMMERING OF MACHINE-GUNS ABOVE THEM NEVER CEASED AS THE GUARDS DUG IN, AS USUAL, LUCKY WAS WORKING AND SOMMERS TALKING AS THEY PREPARED THEIR BREN GUN EMPLACEMENT.

THEY'VE STUCK US
RIGHT ON THE LINE THE
PANZERS WILL TAKE. TRUST
THEM TO FIND US SOME
HOT SPOT.

THERE'S
A REAL
SCRAP GOING
ON UP THERE IN
THE MOUNTAINS.

I'VE BEEN IN
THIS SORT OF SHOW
BEFORE, CHUM. WHEN
THE GOING GETS ROUGH,
STICK CLOSE TO
ME - I'LL SEE YOU'RE
OKAY.

SEEMS TO ME
IT'S THE 'LADS DOWN
THERE IN THE MIDDLE THAT'LL
TAKE THE BASHING.

IT WAS A SLIGHT TREMOR IN SOMMERS' VOICE THAT MADE LUCKY GLANCE UP AND NOTICE THE COLD SWEAT OF FEAR THAT STOOD OUT ON SOMMERS' BROW.

First Of The Line

47

THE GUARDS LAY IN THEIR WEAPON PITS AND WAITED FOR THE ATTACK. EYES STRAINING TO PROBE THE SHADOWS, LUCKY LISTENED TO THE NERVOUS CHATTER OF THE MAN CROUCHED BESIDE HIM.

IT'LL BE LIGHT SOON. THEN THEY'LL COME. ONCE THE BALLOON GOES UP, IT'S NOT SO BAD. IT'S THIS DARNED WAITING THAT GETS YOU. . .



SUDDENLY, A STAR SHELL BURST IN THE SKY ABOVE THEM. IN ITS EERIE WHITE LIGHT THEY COULD SEE SCORES OF MENACING GREY FIGURES RUNNING STEADILY UP THE VALLEY. THEN A HUNDRED GUNS OPENED FIRE IN A MURDEROUS CLAMOUR. . .

ENEMY AT THREE HUNDRED YARDS... RAPID FIRE!



First Of The Line

AS IF IN A DREAM, LUCKY WATCHED FASCINATED, AS THE GERMANS CAME LUMBERING TOWARDS THEM. SOMMERS TRIGGERED THE GUN NERVOUSLY . . .

FOR PETE'S SAKE KEEP THOSE MAGAZINES COMING... WE'VE GOT TO KEEP THIS GUN FIRING.



THE FIRE FROM THE BRITISH GUNS CUT HUGE GAPS IN THE GERMAN RANKS, BUT STILL THEY CAME ON. WITH A CRY OF UTTER PANIC, SOMMERS THREW HIMSELF BACK FROM THE GUN.



First Of The Line

3

NEXT SECOND, THE GERMANS WERE RIGHT ON TOP OF THE POSITION. LUCKY GRABBED HIS RIFLE, WORKING BOLT AND TRIGGER ALMOST SIMULTANEOUSLY AS HE FIRED AT POINT BLANK RANGE.



STAGGERED BY THE FEROCITY OF THE GUARDS' CLOSE-QUARTER FIGHTING, THE GERMANS BROKE AND RAN. LUCKY GAZED DOWN AT HIS COMRADE. THERE WAS A BITING CONTEMPT IN HIS VOICE. . .



GET ON YOUR FEET, MAN! YOU WON'T SAVE YOUR SKIN GROVELLING DOWN THERE.

First Of The Line

WHITE-FACED AND SHAKING, SOMMERS PICKED HIMSELF UP. HE COULD NOT FACE THE ACCUSING YOUNGSTER WHO STOOD BEFORE HIM.

I MUST HAVE TRIPPED OR SOMETHING...

DON'T TRY TO KID ME! YOU DUCKED OUT, MILES... YOU JUST CAN'T TAKE IT!



SOME DISTANCE DOWN THE VALLEY, A GERMAN OFFICER BARKED OUT ORDERS TO AN ARTILLERY BATTERY. THERE WAS TO BE NO LET-UP FOR THE GUARDS. . .

THE INFANTRY ATTACK HAS FAILED TO BREAK THE LINE, OPEN FIRE. WE ARE TO SOFTEN UP THE ENEMY BEFORE THE PANZERS GO IN!



UNDER THE FIERCE BOMBARDMENT FROM THE GERMAN GUNS THE GUARDS HELD THEIR GROUND. THEY COULD ONLY CROUCH IN THEIR FOXHOLES AND ENDURE THE NERVE-RACKING MINUTES UNTIL THE BARRAGE LIFTED. . .



STAND FAST, MEN! WHEN THE SHELLING STOPS, THEY'LL BE COMING IN AGAIN!

STARTLED BY A SUDDEN MOVEMENT BESIDE HIM, LUCKY SPUN ROUND. HE COULD HARDLY RECOGNISE THE HIGH-PITCHED SCREECH THAT WAS SOMMERS' VOICE.



WE'VE GOT TO GET OUT! WE'RE DONE FOR HERE! IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE!

FOR A MOMENT, LUCKY HESITATED. THE URGE TO SAVE HIMSELF WAS STRONG, BUT DEEP WITHIN HIM THE FLAME OF COURAGE STILL BURNED.



NO, MILES... I HATE THIS MOB AS MUCH AS YOU... BUT I'M NOT A QUITTER!

First Of The Line

SOMMERS SPRANG FROM THE TRENCH. BUT THERE, IMPERVIOUS TO THE RAIN OF SHRAPNEL THAT FILLED THE AIR, STOOD A LONE FIGURE. FOR THE SECOND TIME ON THE FIELD OF BATTLE, SOMMERS CAME FACE TO FACE WITH SERGEANT GRANT.

I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR YOU, SOMMERS. YOU GOT AWAY WITH IT ONCE, BUT NOT THIS TIME. ONE MORE STEP AND I'LL PLUG YOU!

GET OUT OF MY WAY, GRANT, NO ONE'S GOING TO STOP ME!

SERGEANT GRANT WAS UNRELENTING. THERE WAS NO MISTAKING THE MENACE OF THE .38 REVOLVER IN THE SERGEANT'S HAND.

IT WAS YOU THEY SENT BACK FOR HELP AT WADI 'EL KERIM AND YOU LET 'EM DIE. SOMMERS, YOU'VE REACHED THE END OF THE LINE.

ALL RIGHT, IT WAS ME! BUT I GOT OUT ALIVE, AND I'M GETTING OUT NOW!

FOR A SECOND, THE SERGEANT FLINCHED AS A SHELL BURST ABOVE THEIR HEADS. IN THAT OFF-GUARD MOMENT, SOMMERS STRUCK WITH THE FEROCITY OF A CORNERED BEAST.



THE MAD DASH FOR FREEDOM WAS SOMMERS' LAST ACTION. TWENTY YARDS FROM THE TRENCH, THE BLAST OF AN EIGHTY-EIGHT M.M. SHELL TOSSED HIM INTO THE AIR.



THE ANGER HAD DIED FROM THE SERGEANT'S FACE AS HE TURNED TO LUCKY JORDAN...

BETTER HE DIED THAT WAY THAN FACE A COURT-MARTIAL. HE'S BROUGHT ENOUGH DISGRACE TO THE BADGE HE WORE.

WAS IT TRUE WHAT YOU SAID, SERGEANT? WAS IT HIS FAULT THAT THE BATTALION WAS SHOT UP?



First Of The Line

OBLIVIOUS OF THE BARRAGE THAT WAS FALLING, LUCKY LISTENED IN A DAZE AS SERGEANT GRANT EXPLAINED THE TRUTH OF THE FOURTH BATTALION'S LAST STAND IN THE DESERT.

THE BATTALION WAS BADLY MAULED, BUT WE COULD HAVE GOT A LOT OF THEM OUT. SOMMERS WAS SENT BACK WITH A MESSAGE, BUT HE WENT TO GROUND INSTEAD.

SO I'VE BEEN WRONG ALL THIS TIME!



IT WAS AS THOUGH A SHADOW HAD LIFTED FROM THE YOUNG SOLDIER. THE OLD EAGER SMILE SPREAD ACROSS HIS FACE AS HE PUSHED THE GUN BACK IN POSITION. HIS TRUST AND FAITH IN THE REGIMENT WAS RESTORED.

YOU'VE BEEN WRONG, SON, BUT YOU'VE PLENTY OF TIME TO MAKE GOOD.

YOU'RE RIGHT, SARGE! DEAD RIGHT... BUT SOMEHOW I FEEL THAT TIME IS RUNNING OUT FOR ME.



Chapter 4. *Fighting Guardsman*

HIGH IN THE CLEAR DAWN SKY A LYSANDER SPOTTER PLANE WHEELED LIKE A LONE BIRD. AS THE PILOT GAZED DOWN, HE COULD SEE THE UGLY PALL OF SMOKE THAT MARKED THE BATTLE STILL RAGING ON THE MOUNTAIN.



SUDDENLY THE OBSERVER STIFFENED. HIS KEEN GAZE SWEEPING THE GROUND BELOW, HAD SIGHTED SUDDEN MOVEMENT.



INSTANTLY, THE PILOT REPORTED THE SIGHTING BACK TO BATTALION H.Q.

HELLO ABLE FIVE... D FOR
DOG CALLING. HAVE SPOTTED
SQUADRON OF ENEMY TIGERS
APPROACHING YOUR POSITION,
OVER.



THE PILOT'S REPORT WAS RECEIVED
AT THE COMMAND POST AND
INSTANTLY ACTED UPON . . .

MAJOR,
THEY'VE SPOTTED
A SQUADRON OF
TIGERS. TAKE
YOUR TROOP TO
INTERCEPT

RIGHT,
SIR!

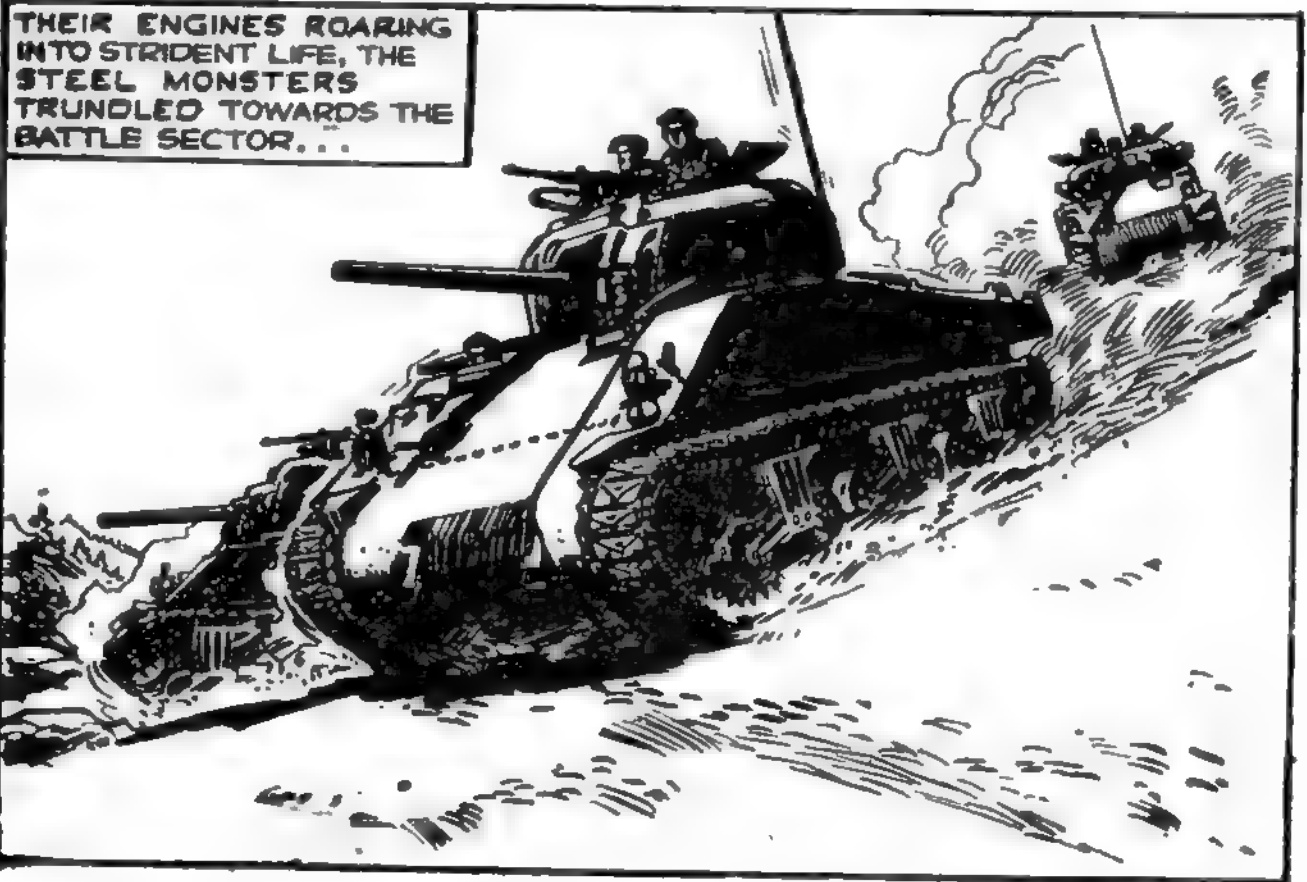


WITHIN MINUTES, THE TROOP OF SHERMAN TANKS WAS ON THE MOVE...

START UP, LADS! I'LL TAKE THE LEAD...



THEIR ENGINES ROARING INTO STRIDENT LIFE, THE STEEL MONSTERS TRUNDLED TOWARDS THE BATTLE SECTOR...



First Of The Line

IN THE GUARDS' POSITION, LUCKY JORDAN LOOKED UP IN HORROR AS HE HEARD THE MENACING GROWL OF THE TIGERS' ENGINES.

LOOK
WHAT'S COMING
NOW,
SARGE!

HOW DO
WE HOLD OFF
THOSE BRUTES
WITH
RIFLES?



SUDDENLY ANOTHER SOUND REACHED HIS EARS. THIS TIME FROM THE REAR OF THEIR POSITION. . .

THERE'S
YOUR ANSWER, SARGE.
SHERMANS! THAT'S A
SIGHT FOR
SORE EYES!



First Of The Line

53

A RAGGED CHEER ROSE FROM THE HARD PRESSED RANKS OF THE GUARDS AS THE SHERMAN TANKS RUMBLED THROUGH THEIR LINES TOWARDS THE APPROACHING MENACE.

GO ON,
YOU SARDINE TINS!
BLOW 'EM BACK
TO BERLIN,
LADS!



THE TWO ARMOURD FORCES LURCHED TOWARDS EACH OTHER... BUT IN THE PATH OF THE BRITISH TANKS LAY A DEADLY, CONCEALED THREAT. . .



A SECOND LATER - DISASTER! THE BRITISH TANKS ENTERED A GERMAN MINEFIELD, AND DEVASTATING EXPLOSIONS BENEATH EACH TANK PUT THEM OUT OF ACTION. . .

SALE
OUT! HEAD BACK
TOWARDS OUR
LINES!



First Of The Line

SERGEANT GRANT FELT A WAVE OF HELPLESSNESS SWEEP OVER HIM AS HE WATCHED THE ONE FORCE THAT COULD SAVE THEM LYING USELESS AND CRIPPLED IN THE PATH OF THE ONCOMING GERMAN.



BEFORE THE SERGEANT COULD STOP HIM, LUCKY LEAPED FROM THE GUN PIT AND RACED TOWARDS THE STRANDED TANKS.



First Of The Line

55

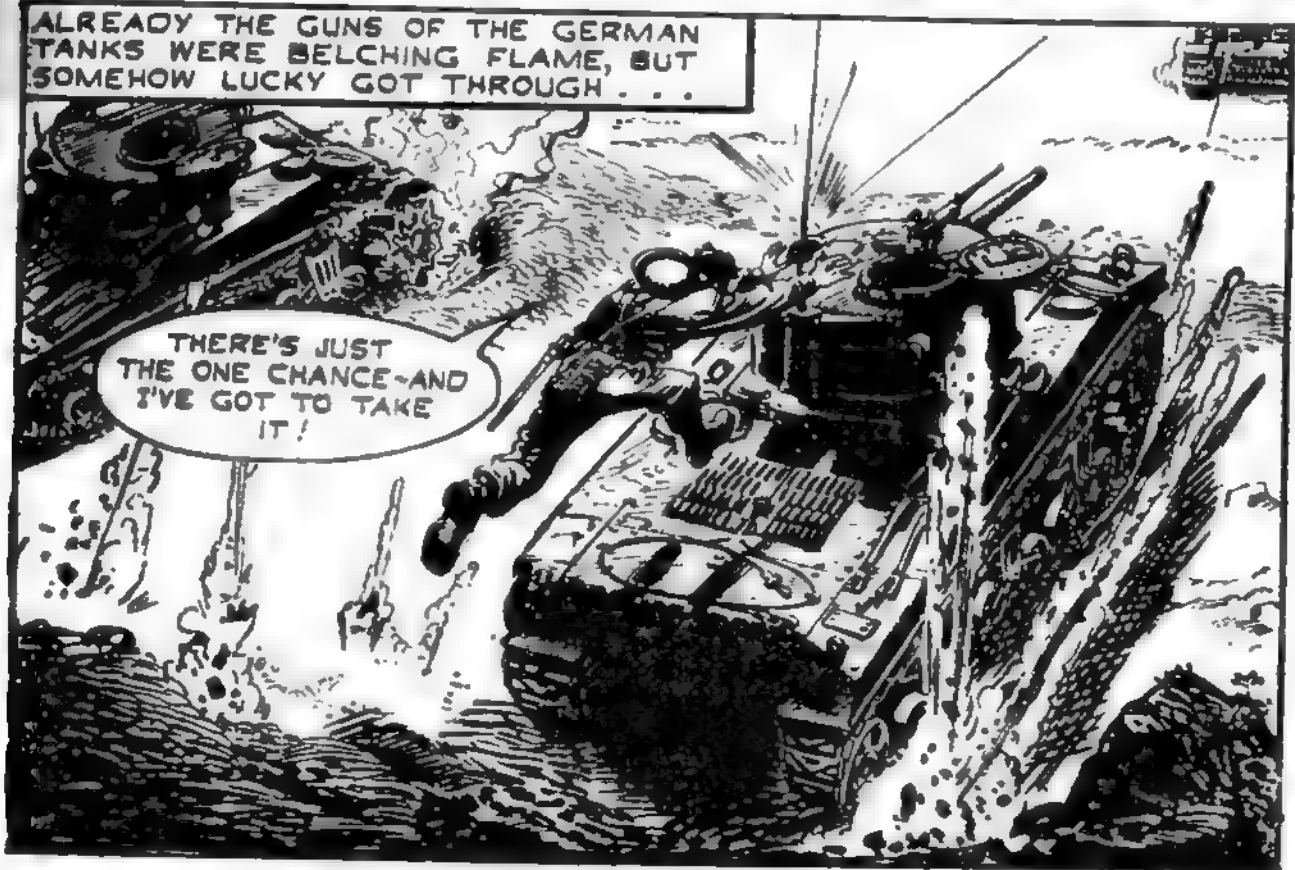
SENSING WHAT LUCKY WAS ATTEMPTING, SERGEANT GRANT YELLED TO HIS MEN.

GIVE HIM COVERING FIRE, LADS!



ALREADY THE GUNS OF THE GERMAN TANKS WERE BELCHING FLAME, BUT SOMEHOW LUCKY GOT THROUGH . . .

THERE'S JUST THE ONE CHANCE-AND I'VE GOT TO TAKE IT!

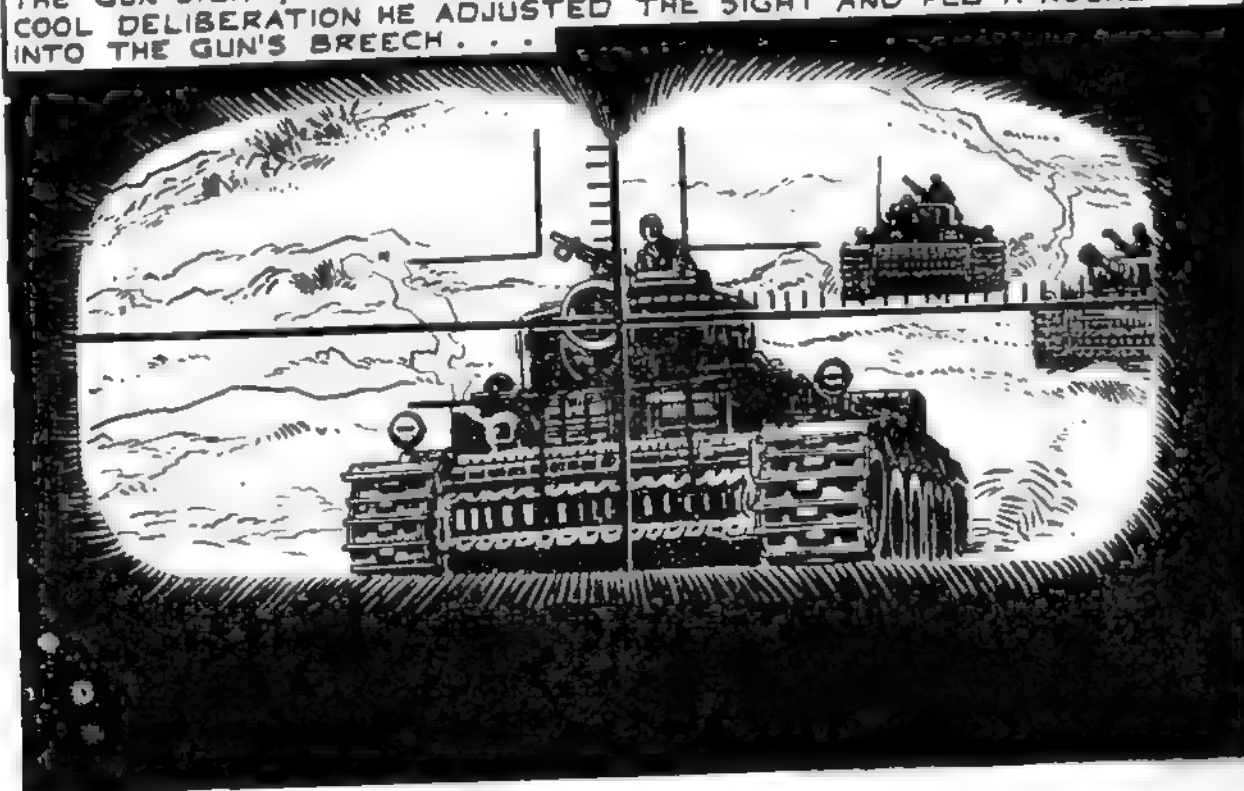


First Of The Line

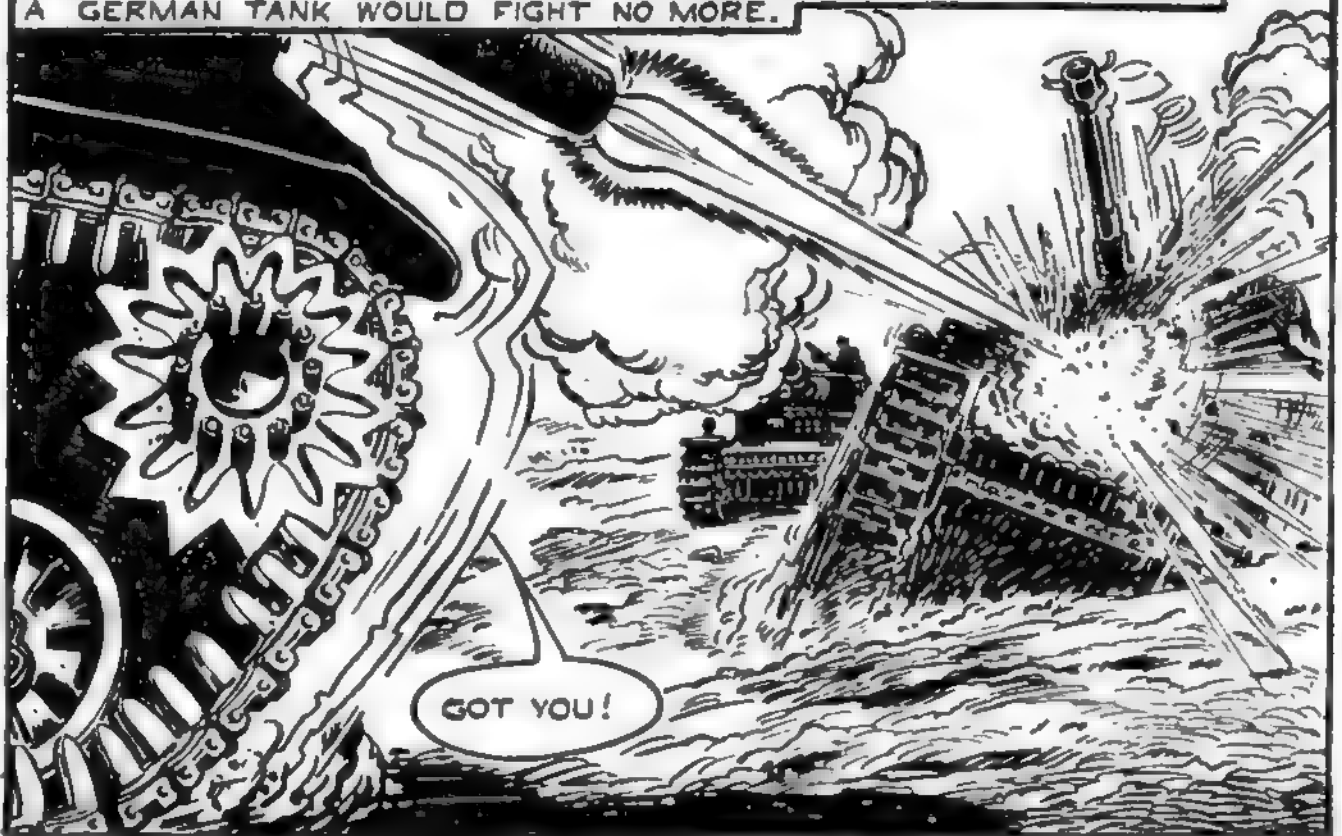
NEXT MOMENT, HE DROPPED INTO THE CONFINES OF THE SHERMAN'S TURRET...



THE LEADING GERMAN TANK WAS AT POINT BLANK RANGE. THROUGH THE GUN-SIGHT, LUCKY GAZED INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH ITSELF. WITH COOL DELIBERATION HE ADJUSTED THE SIGHT AND FED A ROUND INTO THE GUN'S BREECH. . .



WITH A SAVAGE CRASH, THE GUN LEAPED BACK ON ITS RECOIL. A GERMAN TANK WOULD FIGHT NO MORE.



FURIOUSLY, THE GERMAN COMMANDER URGED HIS MEN ON...



REMORSELESSLY, AVENGING FIRE CRASHED AGAINST THE LONE SHERMAN. THE IMPACT OF THE SHELLS FLUNG LUCKY TO THE TURRET FLOOR.



WITH A SAVAGE GRIN, THE GALLANT YOUNGSTER DRAGGED HIMSELF UP AND RELOADED THE GUN.

YOU'RE
FIGHTING THE
GUARDS, JERRY!
WE DIE
HARD!



AGAIN THE GUN ROARED AND THE TRACKS RIPPED FROM THE SIDE OF ANOTHER GERMAN TANK.



First Of The Line

59

BUT THE ODDS WERE TOO GREAT. AN H.E. SHELL FOUND ITS MARK AND FLAMES BEGAN TO LICK AT THE SIDES OF THE HOPELESSLY OUTNUMBERED BRITISH TANK.

THIS ONE'S
BREWING UP...
MUST GET
OUT!



THERE COULD BE ONLY ONE END, AND LUCKY KNEW IT MUST COME SOON. NONE THE LESS, HE FLUNG HIMSELF TOWARDS ONE OF THE OTHER ABANDONED TANKS.



First Of The Line

AS HE CROSSED THE ENGINE DECKS, A MACHINE-GUN BULLET SEARED ACROSS HIS SHOULDER, FLINGING HIM FORWARD. WITH A TREMENDOUS EFFORT, HE DRAGGED HIMSELF TOWARDS THE TURRET.

WITH ONE ARM
OUT OF ACTION, I CAN'T
LOAD THE BIG GUN.
BUT I CAN STILL
FIRE THE MACHINE-
GUN.



BY A SUPREME EFFORT OF WILL POWER HE REACHED THE GUN. THROUGH RED-HOT MISTS OF PAIN, HE JERKED BACK THE COCKING HANDLE.

JUST A
LITTLE CLOSER,
JERRY.



FOR THOSE FEW VITAL MOMENTS, THE GERMANS HAD BEEN DIVERTED FROM THEIR TASK. THE GUARDS' COMMANDING OFFICER SAW HIS CHANCE. ABOVE THE DEAFENING ROAR OF THE GUNS HIS VOICE RANG OUT.



IT WAS THE CALL TO ACTION. THE GUARDS FLUNG THEMSELVES FORWARD. COLONEL KIDSTONE BELLOWED THE ORDER THAT HAD ECHOED DOWN THROUGH THE YEARS OF THE BRIGADE'S GLORIOUS HISTORY.



First Of The Line

WITH HIS STRENGTH RAPIDLY FAILING, LUCKY KEPT HIS GUN BLAZING DEFIANCE AT THE GERMAN TANKS. FAINTLY, ABOVE THE NOISE OF THE BATTLE, HE HAD HEARD THE ORDER TO CHARGE. THERE WAS A SMILE OF CONTENTMENT ON HIS LIPS AS HE FELL BACK FROM THE GUN.



WITH BAYONETS AND GRENADES, THE GUARDS STORMED FORWARD RECKLESSLY. THEY PRISED OPEN THE TANK HATCHES AND HURLED DESTRUCTION AT THE CREWS WITHIN.



THE FIGHT WAS SHARP AND BITTER. IN THE CENTRE OF THE TUMULT, A YOUNG FIGURE LAY STILL WHERE HE HAD FALLEN. LUCKY JORDAN HAD DIED, AS HIS BROTHERS BEFORE HIM, DOING HIS DUTY, UNFLINCHINGLY.



THE GUARDS HAD HELD THE LINE. IN THE SILENCE THAT FELL, TWO MEN STOOD ALONE.

SO IT WAS THE YOUNG RENEGADE FROM YOUR PLATOON THAT BEAT THE JERRIES, SERGEANT!



First Of The Line



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1/10/63

ALSO ON SALE NOW
FOR WAR THRILLS . . . ACTION . . . DRAMA . . .

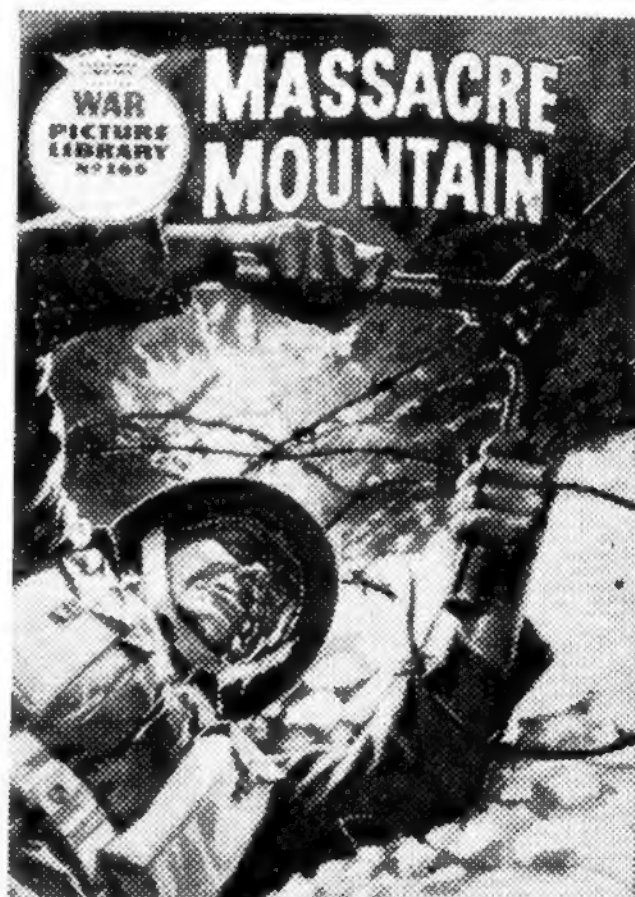
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